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ABSTRACT

This report documents a national examination of the role of the public library in rural America. The investigation consisted of a study of public library use patterns in over 300 libraries among 2,485 adults (44% of the total contacted) in nonmetropolitan America. Seven of 10 public library users in rural areas are women, with a median age of 42 years. Lack of time and lack of need are cited as the most common reasons for not using the library, with having a lack of transportation, being physically unable to access the library, and not knowing what is at the library also cited. Forty-five percent of respondents use the library or its services at least once a month. Respondents were often unfamiliar with services other than books, magazines, and newspapers, and there was an overall discrepancy between their needs for daily information and their reliance on the library for bestsellers and reference books. Several strategies are suggested to change the perceptions about and uses of rural libraries. One table and 14 graphs illustrate the survey findings. (Contains 38 references.) (SLD)

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ED 368 357

Assessing the Role of the Rural Public Library

1993

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ASSESSING THE ROLE OF THE RURAL PUBLIC LIBRARY

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- Seven out of ten individuals who use the rural public library or its services are women.
- The median age of the typical user is 42 years. The nonusers median age is 49.
- Overall, respondents indicate that a "lack of time" and "having no need" as the two most significant reasons for not using the library more often.
- Nonusers, more often than users, cite a "lack of transportation," "being physically unable," and "not being sure of what is at the library" as reasons for not using the library more often.
- Forty-five percent of the respondents use the library or its services at least monthly.
- Overall, approximately 70% of the users would be interested in the library making available "computerized information," "job training," "books on tape," and "activities for senior Americans." Thirty percent of the nonusers would also be interested.
- While 70% of the users said that they saw or heard advertisements about the library within the last week, over 40% of the nonusers claimed that they couldn't remember ever hearing or seeing anything.
- Although eight out of ten library users were familiar with services other than books, magazines, and newspapers, half of the nonusers were not.
- When respondents were asked what strategies they choose to get information on certain subjects, the top choice was "ask a professional," followed by "ask a friend or relative," and "use the public library." Only 20% of the nonusers thought of the public library as a first choice.
- Library users have a greater need for information and use the library more often than nonusers on matters pertaining to: local news, programs of education, bestsellers, decisions of local government, reference or how–to books, health/medical services, and videocassettes.
- There is a disparity between respondents need for daily information and reliance on the library for bestsellers and reference/how–to books.

PREFACE

The purpose of this report is to document a national examination of the role of the public library in rural America. It is a companion endeavor to *Assessing the Information Needs of Rural Americans* (Vavrek 1990). This latter investigation consisted of a study of public library use patterns among 3500 adults residing in non–metropolitan America. Over 300 libraries were used as sites for the distribution of in–house questionnaires.

Both studies, referred to above, were financially supported through grants received under Title IIB of the Higher Education Act. The author is indebted to the staff of the Public Library Program within the United States Department of Education. As in all instances, Yvonne Carter was particularly helpful. While thanks are being provided, the efforts of the Project's Advisory Committee, work of the library science students who placed over 6,000 telephone calls, and the staff of the Center for the Study of Rural Librarianship, are especially meritorious. Daryl Heasley, Director of the Northeast Regional Center for Rural Development has consistently and wisely advised the author on a variety of project matters. It was through his encouragement that letters introducing the survey were sent in advance of telephone calls to respondents and that Library Science students at Clarion University of Pennsylvania were utilized as phone surveyors rather than turning to some commercial polling establishment. Not only did students respond superbly, this project provided them with a unique learning opportunity. Carla and Tom Shilts and Ross James were particularly helpful in organizing and coordinating the logistics of the telephone survey itself. Finally, a special thanks to Nancy Harriger and Barbara Reed who assisted with the production of survey materials, and Carol Barrette whose patience and talents may be seen in the physical compilation of this document.

NEED

The need for this project and the one resulting in *Assessing the Information Needs of Rural Americans* (Vavrek 1990) developed from the situation that no national studies of public library use have been conducted exclusively among non-metropolitan audiences. Further, no recent study of public library use in the United States has taken on the dimensions of this present investigation. For example, Estabrook (1991) was limited to approximately 1200 respondents and Westin and Finger (1991) was compiled as part of a general marketing survey compiled by Harris/Equifax with the data provided to the American Library Association rather than specifically being targeted as a study of library use. Parenthetically, *Using the Public Library in the Computer Age* (Westin and Finger 1991), while important for consideration, provides data which do not stand the test of previous studies, particularly in relation to both the gender and age of typical library clients. Perhaps, it is owing to the stratified sample that was used in the investigation.

The author is calling attention to Westin and Finger (1991) because it is being used as a rallying point to "prove" how often public libraries are currently being frequented. Although it may play well in Chicago (if not Peoria), representatives of the library community are responding to an emotional high — rather than reality — to accept the view that 66% of the American society are public library users. It should be stressed that 24% of this 66% consisted of respondents who utilized the library at monthly or less frequent intervals. This should not swell one with confidence.

At the outset, it should be noted as well, that American librarianship, whether nationally or locally, has not placed high value on the notion that regular client feedback is essential for the life of the institution. While it may be overly enthusiastic to recite

recommendations related to a study in its prefatory pages, unless those responsible for public librarianship in the United States understand that they are violating a basic principle of marketing in their failure to solicit regular client feedback, there is little hope that the public library will be able to change to meet the future requirements of an information society.

While trying to maintain a modest posture, this present investigation and its precursor are unique — in addition to their non-metropolitan targeting — in that they present an opportunity to compare both what is described as the "library user" and "nonuser." These concepts are obviously relative views of life. The historical tendency of studies, for a variety of reasons, has been to focus on the in-library use of things. At the same time, it should be noted that there is no greater challenge for all of public librarianship than to broaden the base of its constituencies — not only to naturally include the typical book reader but also to appeal to those whose lives revolve around electronic information access. Whether these things may be accomplished before the demise of the public library is a moot issue. By "demise," the author is referring to whether or not those responsible for public librarianship in the United States can respond to the competition that exists in the form of online, cable, HDTV, networked, and Internet defined services. These are sweeping away the institutional library.

METHODOLOGY

Between the period of February 1991, and June 1991, (n =) 5676 adults, at least 17 years old, were phoned within the continental United States. A sample representing the non-metropolitan regions of the United States was drawn by Survey Sampling, Incorporated, Bridgeport, Connecticut. The term," non-metropolitan," was used to define communities outside of a metropolitan area but inclusive of places no larger than 25,000 people. This latter definition was also used as the upper limit in *Assessing the Information Needs of Rural Americans* (Vavrek 1990), and has consistently been used by the Center for the Study of Rural Librarianship as its working definition of "rural." Library Science students within the Department of Library Science, Clarion University of Pennsylvania, shouldered the responsibility of phoning each respondent at least three different times of the day/evening to seek compliance.

Particularly troublesome was the matter of fashioning the questionnaire itself. Even with proper pre-testing, several of the questions (the actual survey document appears in the appendix of this report) were revised at least twice to insure consistent content and to improve upon the ability of the telephone surveyors to smoothly conduct their conversations. Additionally, there was concern about the questionnaire's overall length in relation to defined informational needs. A series of questions, taking approximately ten minutes to complete over the phone, was eventually developed.

Despite the growing number of answering machines, disconnected phones, and the general disinclination of respondents to participate, surveying efforts yielded a usable response rate of n = 2,485 (44%). Contributing to these highly satisfactory results, which exceeded the national average of 42% (Walker Research 1992), was not only the excellent

efforts displayed by the phone surveyors, but also the technique of mailing introductory letters prior to the phone calls provided positive reinforcement. While comparisons were not made to track a direct correlation between completed phone conversations and the availability of notification letters, clearly, it would have been a mistake not to have informed the respondent beforehand. It must be admitted, however, because of the fact that individually typed, addressed, and signed letters were sent to prospective respondents, the logistics of producing almost 6,000 letters (even with our trusty word processor and printer) was a daunting task. Further, mailing these letters had to be timed carefully in relation to the eventual telephone calls. It was important, for example, not to send the letter of introduction too much in advance of the actual telephone call out of a concern that potential respondents would have forgotten our correspondence to them. Also as a matter of office logistics, surveyors were forced to play a game of "telephone chairs" attempting to scrounge access to all available phones and not interfere with daily routines in the Department of Library Science.

To assist in the interpretation of the statistical and narrative references in this document, it should be noted that the *SAS System* of analysis was used on a VAX computer, and that terminology, particularly categories utilized as part of the questionnaire, will typically be placed within quotation marks for purposes of identification. The repeated references to (Vavrek 1990) represent the earlier survey of library clients, which was compiled into *Assessing the Information Needs of Rural Americans*. Further, charts identified as "1991 survey" refer to the investigation being described in this document.

PUBLIC LIBRARIANSHIP IN THE UNITED STATES

In an effort to provide a context to assist in the interpretation of the data resulting from this study of the use of public libraries in non-metropolitan America, the author would like to offer the following prologue. It is further provided out of a concern that those responsible for public libraries in the United States seem to be disinterested in tampering with the status quo and as a consequence are being overwhelmed by a series of inexorable trends that are life threatening to the future of the institution. These transformations are not secrets known only to the author, but rather are part of the public record. This is what makes the situation even more alarming. While there have been responses to change, these seem to be occurring in small increments, at best. Perhaps this is not surprising in an historical sense, but it suggests a lack of ability to deal with current realities. The measured, conservative approach to public librarianship will not work in an information society. Neither will the present public library. A new model is necessary.

A perusal of the national press yields a variety of instances of American institutions attempting to rethink or reorder themselves in relation to the roles they play on the evolving national/international scene, as, e.g., "Rethinking the Plain Old Telephone" (Ramirez 1993) or "Futuristic Lessons From a Public TV Show" (Rifkin 1993). One is hard-pressed, however, to discover the same type of basic introspection concerning the nature of libraries — particularly public libraries. This is not to suggest that public libraries aren't in the process of being changed. As one of my graduate students was quick to remind me, the employment of technology in the library, such as, online catalogs, CD-ROM data bases, etc., must be viewed as responsive to the challenges of the information society and evidence of change. While this latter example is appropriate to consider, at the

same time, one does not see evidence of an urgency among those responsible for public library service to re-examine the nature of the library itself. This disinclination to look in a mirror and create sweeping change is relatively easy to comprehend when one understands symbolically the public library movement in the United States. Its strength was derived from permanence and the lack of quick change, or at least protection from a minimum of disruptions in its effort to offer services and to collect and preserve that which was interpreted to be important. Additionally, "public institutions like libraries have a hard time responding to paradigmatic shifts. Their present business may seem to be as much as they can handle" (Holt 1991, 20).

Unfortunately, what has now punctured the conventional and safe model of public librarianship are a variety of societal trends along with management problems that include branch libraries in metropolitan centers and those in rural areas being closed, public library directors being asked to administer school library systems, and the general disappearance of library matters from national attention. "In Massachusetts, 20 libraries have had to close in the last six years" (Miller 1993, 22). Sadly, there was no conversation about libraries during the most recent presidential campaign and Mr. Perot's electronic appeal to voters was not only symbolic of how technology effects politics and vice-versa but the broader role of disseminating information through a new format. And not the library.

Those responsible for the public library movement are ignoring a pattern of national non-recognition that did not necessarily begin with the most recent White House Conference on Libraries and Information Services — but that event served as a powerful reminder of our collective anonymity. The only recognition in the press from the White House Conference was of Millie the dog. How cute, but how devastating. As one of my colleagues correctly observed, the White House Conference was considered as another ho-hum library meeting and not a worthy news story. July of 1991 provided the library

community with an opportunity for rethinking the role of libraries in society — especially the public library — but the chance was lost. It shouldn't be surprising that a recent Congressional Research Service report (Riddle 1992) posited the question of whether or not the White House Conferences (there was also one in 1979) have had any significant impact at the federal level.

So despite reports of successful bond issues, exciting efforts at confronting illiteracy and joblessness, the purchase of new bookmobiles, and long-lines of youngsters waiting for story hours, one is both baffled and depressed because of the aimlessness of the public library movement in the United States. Or is it that there is no such thing as the "public library movement," rather simply public libraries in different places? Its amazing to me as a student of libraries how societal and demographic trends are being ignored with a business–as–usual mentality. It is as if all of our library leaders are focused on their own concerns and there is no one left to confront the "big picture." It is the author's hope that this situation is not a matter of neglect or disinterest, but rather because of an uncertainty of what to do.

TRENDS

First, the public library, which developed as an agency of mass communications, now exists in an environment that makes the concept of "human mosaic" sound like an understatement. The suggestion that in the near future some states will be comprised mostly of minority populations is clearly an indication of what is happening. "Almost 25 percent of foreign-born Americans came to the U. S. between 1985 and 1990. In fact, since 1960, the number of foreign-born residents has more than tripled from 1.5 million to 5.6 million (*The Numbers News* 1993, 1). Small towns are also being affected by changing patterns, but the circumstances are less pronounced. This diversity of constituencies is not only a problem in relation to the public library attempting to deliver services to no longer the same "mass audiences," but is compounded by the fact that few institutions have ongoing methods of soliciting feedback from their clientele to monitor the effects of change. Further, the multiplication of specialty magazines, regionally produced books, and targeted publications provide an impossible challenge for even the largest public library in the United States to satisfy the information needs of constituents.

Second, on the back of client diversity is the fact that people are moving away from metropolitan centers where the public library movement began in favor of the suburbs and beyond. The concept of "edge cities" is now part of this new frontier mechanism for living (Garreau 1991). In rural areas, as well, Americans are on the move to "pretend" suburbs (they are called townships in Pennsylvania) which circle small towns. While public library systems have moved along demographically with their clients via branch libraries as population centers have changed, and others have provided access in the form of dial-in, telephone assistance, services to the homebound, etc.; the concept of "going" to

the library has been radically affected. At the same time, Americans have a renewed enthusiasm about making their homes into their "castles" and the locus of their activities. Faith Popcorn (1991) and others who talk about people cocooning at home encourage those responsible for all institutions to consider how traditional services will have to change. "They are sitting at home in their rustic American living rooms, eating comfort food, and watching comedies about extended families and wacky-but-endearing small towns" (Edmondson 1991, n.p.) This is why television manufacturers are now labeling their new products as "home theater," which the average American watches for 4 hours and 30 minutes a day (Waldrop 1993).

Third, while the business world understands the concepts of convenience and saving time for customers (food delivered at home, ATMs, VCRs, drive-in everything, pay-per-view television, etc.,) the typical public library is unable to compete either emotionally or practically. One is not ignoring exciting efforts at library outreach. Conceptually, however, the public library continues to be a librarian's view of life rather than one organized to be as convenient as possible for clients. To the public, the library is still a place rather than a service.

Fourth, notwithstanding efforts to offer an array of informational resources, the typical client continues to perceive the public library as a place of books. Historically, research findings have usually confirmed the "bookish" label associated with public libraries. Contemporary public opinion research has reaffirmed the fact that bestsellers are much more popular among library users than asking reference questions (Estabrook 1991; Wittig 1991; Vavrek 1990; Vavrek 1990, *Pennsylvania*). Perhaps it is not surprising then, that despite the continuum of resources available, the public library is not at the top of the food chain when the typical patron is looking for information. (This situation is commented upon later in this document). Parenthetically, it simply propagates a myth when national library figures attempt to convince audiences that the public library is the

first place that Americans look for information. It may play well in Peoria, but it is unfortunately inaccurate. In a relatively recent investigation of information access among small business owners, "libraries" finished 13th out of 17th in rank order of use (Morrison 1990).

Fifth, despite all of the efforts by staff members and the wonderful mix of resources available through the public library, the typical American has neither the time nor perceived need to use its services (Estabrook 1991, Vavrek 1990). Without question, these circumstances are most depressing. The author is firmly convinced, however, that one of the enduring problems facing those who are responsible for library services is to overcome the public's continuing uncertainty of exactly what is available in the typical library. This situation can only be improved through daily public relation efforts. A justified concern, however, certainly has to be how much longer it will take to redress this long-playing problem.

Sixth, eventually, librarians will be able to create an awareness among their clients of the services and resources available even in the smallest public institution. While this is happening, however, personal computers, data phones, cable television, electronic books, bulletin boards, and 900 phone services — estimated now to be available through 300 newspapers (Piirto 1993), will make it increasingly difficult for the institutional library to compete. In a recent national survey, Americans indicated that the top ten new technological products that are being craved include: recording CD player; lap-top computer; HDTV; car telephone; interactive television, video telephone; pocket cellular phone; VCR Plus; digital audio tape; and an electronic organizer (Roper 1992).

It is understood that not every American will be able to participate in this electronic nirvana. But the business sector's concept of an "information appliance," that is, something that may be used as conveniently as a kitchen toaster, may eventually correct that circumstance as well.

Seventh, on matters of library funding, Glen Holt (1992) has reminded us that despite the efforts to be as diversified and responsive to human needs as possible, the dimensions of library economics and financial support are being eroded by the declining number of Americans who hold jobs, particularly professional, financial, and information related ones. At the same time, public libraries cannot survive by only appealing to those who are least likely to be able to pay to support the library.

As suggested earlier, the public library's attempt to confront societal problems was more feasible in the early decades of the twentieth century when there was a mass audience with similar needs, as, e.g., acculturation. There are now too many constituency groups and too many concerns looking for solutions.

Eighth, directly related to the variety of complex problems waiting to be "fixed," is the tendency of public librarians to want to do everything. Programs of continuing education may be helpful to the intellect but they drive service minded librarians to even greater heights of frustration by seemingly encouraging one to do more and more. While there is a great deal of discussion in the library community about marketing, it is badly understood in practice. Otherwise there would not be an accelerated effort to yet offer more and more diversified services particularly in the absence of client feedback. Marketers remind us that an institution must carefully choose its major objectives in the light of the fact that it operates within a finite budget.

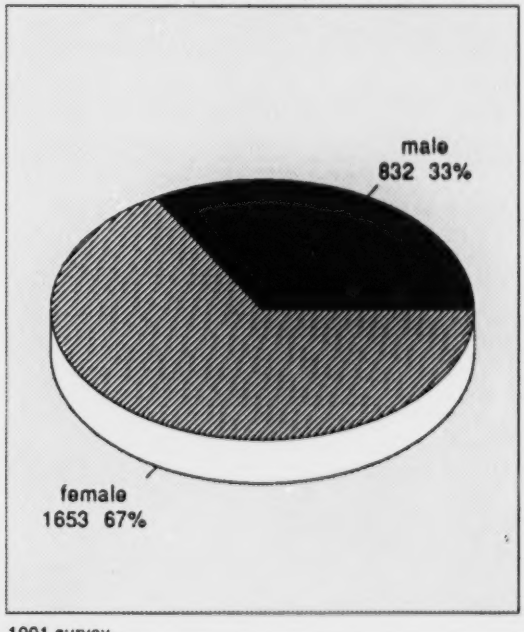
Although the author has decided to conclude with the above listing, it is not complete. It should also include: a consideration of a general decline in the time spent reading; the increasing number of households maintained by a single parent: "In 1960, only 10% of American children lived with a single parent. By 1990, this figure was estimated at 40%" (Boutilier 1993, 4); the "graying" of America; the effect of the Americans with Disability Act on libraries; and, the growing popularity of telecommuting and/or working at home, estimated to now include over 30% of employed Americans (Roper 1993).

With the previous commentary as illustrative of some of the major trends facing those responsible for public librarianship in the United States, the following represents an analysis of the survey data.

SURVEY NARRATIVE

Although it is a rather conventional direction with which to proceed, the first two graphs are indicative of both the age and gender of the respondents who were queried by telephone. It may be of interest to note that each phone number was called at least three times with an emphasis on evening hours to limit any potential of reaching only those who are home during the day. Surveyors asked to speak with whomever answered the phone as long as that individual was at least seventeen years old. Another variable to consider in relation to any phone survey is apparently the propensity for women to answer the telephone in the household and that "females tend to participate in more studies on average (Walker Research 1992, 2). Additionally, one might consider the fact that only 25% of rural women work full–time outside of the home (O'Malley 1992).

Gender of Respondents



1991 survey

Vavrek (1990), in the survey conducted among respondents in rural and small libraries that will be utilized as a basis for comparison in this document, showed a dichotomy of 27% male users and 73% female. The subject of the female dominated use of the public library, although not a totally settled issue [two of the author's favorite researchers (Willits and Willits 1989) attribute it to surveying bias], may be visualized historically from previous use studies (Knight and Nourse 1969, Doremus Porter Novelli 1987). The tendency of women to be clients of the rural and small public library, therefore, is not surprising, although the extent of domination is. A recent national survey of the use of the bookmobile in rural America shows the same pattern of female use (Vavrek 1992).

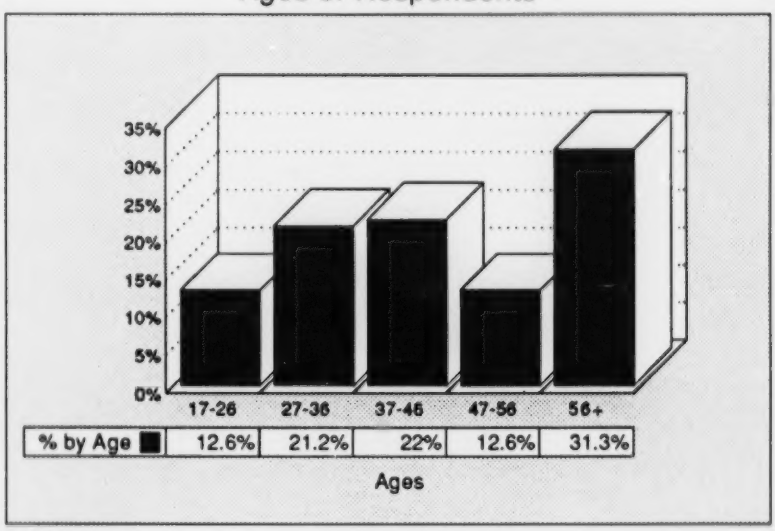
In response to the view that female use is driven by women frequenting the library for a multiple of reasons in addition to their own, Vavrek (1990) re-surveyed a subset of the original respondents and discovered that in only 28% of the instances were women on library errands for other people. O'Malley (1992) suggests that rural women are interested in information about homemaking activities like decorating, cooking, quilting, and sewing. The following table taken from Vavrek (1990) will help to distinguish the fact that women have different information needs than men and use the library appropriately for these needs.

Table 1: Significant Differences of Information Needs and Reliance on Library by Women.
Based on Wilcoxon Two Sample Test

SUBJECT	NEED[1]	LIBRARY USE[2]
Local social services	p=0.0000	p=0.0000
Matters of self-improvement	n/a	p=0.0028
National news	n/a	p=0.0000
Local news	p=0.0001	n/a
Hobby/craft	p=0.0000	p=0.0000
Local community events	p=0.0000	n/a
Programs of education	p=0.0000	p=0.0000
Bestsellers	p=0.0000	p=0.0000
How-to-do-it/reference	n/a	p=0.0001
Health/medical services	p=0.0000	p=0.0000
Local business/investment	p=0.0000	p=0.0000
Action of gov officials	p=0.0001	p=0.0053
Local ordinances/laws	p=0.0001	n/a
Videocassettes	p=0.0003	p=0.0001

[1] In each case, women reported higher information needs than men.
[2] In each case, women reported greater reliance on the library than men.

On the matter of the respondents age, Vavrek (1990) did not use a frequency distribution in the analysis. Rather, the average age of the typical female client was determined to be 44 years, and the male user was 47 years old. As a basis for comparison, but in a study not restricted to non–metropolitan America, Estabrook (1991) delineated a body of respondents of whom 55% were over 40 years of age. The aging of America, of course, is not a well kept secret. The concern, rather, is the ability of the public library to respond to the information needs of this "graying" clientele. While it is estimated that during the 1990s the people aged 45 and older will grow by 18 million, marketers warn that middle–aged individuals do not necessarily follow the same crowd but that they do respond to the values of autonomy, social connectedness, altruism, personal growth, and revitalization (Wolfe 1992). This investigation did not test for these latter values, however, they are characteristics easily attributable to senior Americans in rural and small towns.



1991 survey

On the issue of client profile, both by gender and age, the critical factor — notwithstanding national norms — is that those responsible for library services at the local level

must clearly be able to model their clientele on a regular basis. And not merely by casual observation. While this presents a special challenge in the rural and small library because of limited staffing, it is a critical factor in the ability to offer timely and needed services. Likewise, if the female library user predominates at the local level, one must not only attempt to recognize this circumstance — even if this client has been particularly targeted — but use the "female factor" as a source of lobbying efforts. At the same time, however, it would be an egregious error to depict women in small town America as comprising the "Clever–type" family. In the United States as a whole, with the growing number of single mothers and the overall percentage of women in the workforce, it is not surprising that they feel the greatest amount of stress and have less time for relaxation when compared with working fathers and the unmarried (Godbey and Graefe 1993). Unless those responsible for the management of public libraries give particular concern to this cohate of supporter (women), they may discover this base will erode in the future. At the same time, however, the mother's inability to take the kids to the library may be offset by the increasing targeting of day care centers — both through conventional and outreach type efforts. "No doubt, the coming years will bring new hopes, new expectations, and new challenges as Americans continue to adjust to their changing roles in changing times (Roper December 1992, 3).

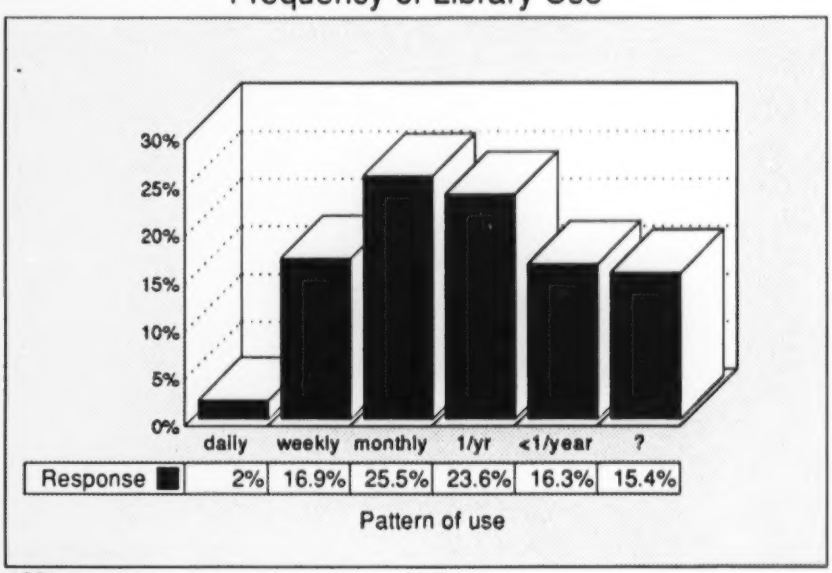
Future library success (and the ability to survive) must be viewed as more than a matter of courting women, however. Specific effort must be aimed directly at expanding the base of support through an augmentation in the number and diversity of active library clients. As suggested earlier in this document, the diversity of the United States is accelerating. This is also particularly evident in rural America.

For the researcher and the interested audience, the relative normalcy of the graph showing the frequency of library use as defined by those polled by telephone, hides the vagaries of interpreting the concept of use between and among library studies. For example, Westin and Finger (1991) and Estabrook (1991) both employ the categories of

"one – four times," "five – 11 times," and "12 times or more during the past year" as their categories of library use. Additionally, and not surprisingly, investigators see different "magic" in the same thing. The optimist reading the pattern of use for this present study might postulate the fact that about 45% of the respondents are active library users because of their "daily", "weekly", and "monthly" habits, with the remainder consisting of "annual", "fewer than annual", and "can't remember" usage patterns. This researcher's personal bias, however, is that the monthly use of any institution doesn't place it in the popular and, therefore, important category. While this investigator would be the first to acknowledge his limited understanding of the business world, it does seem unlikely that any enterprise could survive in a small town with customers coming only once a month.

As a matter of comparison, the reader may be interested to know that in *Assessing the Information Needs of Rural Americans* (Vavrek 1990), 68% of those surveyed in the library indicated they were weekly clients and 11% said that they used their public library on a daily basis.

Frequency of Library Use



1991 survey

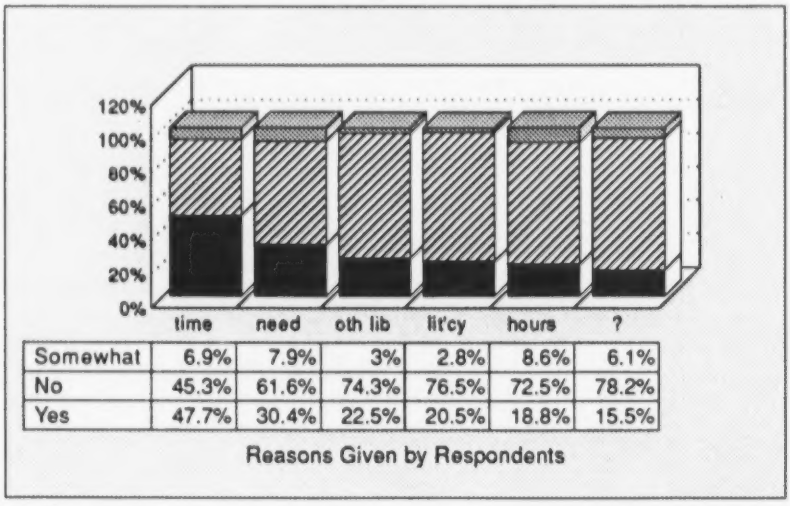
It is more than an academic matter that researchers tabulate things in different arrays and those at the sideline cheer about disparate things. Westin and Finger (1991), in a report published by the American Library Association under the title, *Using the Public Library in the Computer Age*, has led those in leadership roles within the library community to boast about the fact that 66% of the American public uses their public library on an annual basis. While this is apparently an accurate statistic, it is based on the fact that 42% of those surveyed utilized their public library "12 times or more" (with no further clarification) and 24% indicated a use of "five – 11 times during the past year." This really does not suggest the groundswell of populist support that some would wish. The author's intent is not to denigrate the results provided by Westin and Finger (1991), but rather to suggest it is symptomatic of the type of subjective evidence around which public librarianship is structured in the United States. Perhaps our difficulty in articulating the value of libraries to the public is that we don't really have a clue about how to do this.

As a means of determining some of the reasons that might be preventing individuals from using their libraries on a more active basis, a set of questions was asked of the respondents with the partial results seen in the next graph. While perhaps it is not surprising that individuals perceive a lack of time to be a major obstacle to library use, since Americans view their situations consisting of less time outside of work to pursue leisure activities (Godbey and Graefe 1993), it is distressing that 38% (this includes the responses "yes" and "somewhat") of the respondents indicated that "I have no need." Estabrook (1991) and Vavrek (1990) also found that "a lack of time," and "no need" to be the top reasons for a lack of more aggressive library use.

Those Library Science students who performed as telephone pollsters, were emotionally dashed by respondents who told them that they didn't have any need for the library. After all, it is more than just a little deflating to be assured the importance and wonderfulness of libraries in society through class discussions, professional literature, etc., and

then to be baptized into the real world of cynicism. Aside from the real–world lesson, all of public librarianship need to hear the same message. "I have no need." The reason for pointing this out, of course, is not to achieve some cruel thrill but rather for those responsible for library services to be aware of the reasons for nonuse and to determine a course correction. "No need" may really be a circumstance in that community people are just not familiar enough with services to be able to determine what is available to satisfy individual situations.

Reasons for not Using the Library more Often



	time	need	oth lib	lit'cy	hours	?
Somewhat	6.9%	7.9%	3%	2.8%	8.6%	6.1%
No	45.3%	61.6%	74.3%	76.5%	72.5%	78.2%
Yes	47.7%	30.4%	22.5%	20.5%	18.8%	15.5%

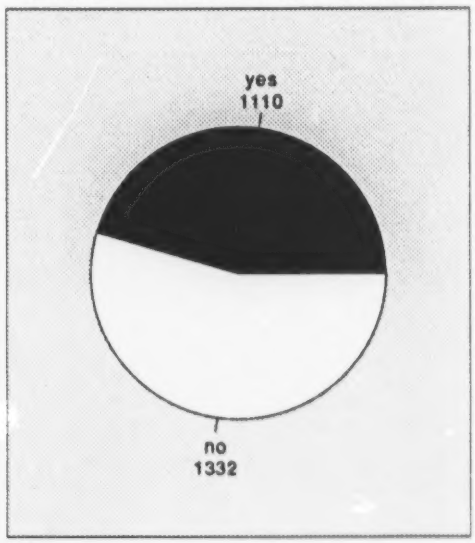
Reasons Given by Respondents

1991 survey

Yes No Somewhat

It's the author's belief that the next graph speaks visually about the dichotomy of needs/use. The question put to the respondents over the telephone was: "Other than books, magazines, and newspapers, are you familiar with other materials or services that your public library has? Although a respectable percentage of those answering were aware of things other than books, magazines, and newspapers that are available at the library, a majority were not. Not surprisingly, through a cross tabulation of the data, library users are shown to respond more positively to this question than nonusers. That is, library users are inclined to be more familiar with services other than newspapers, books,

and magazines than nonusers (anyone who used the library less frequently than "monthly" was considered a nonuser).

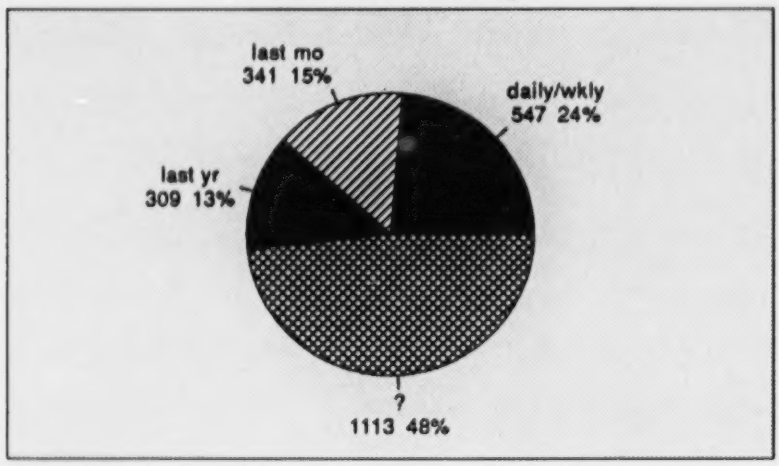


The previous commentary above would seem to suggest that an active public relations campaign, if not marketing effort, is very much needed in rural and small public libraries around the United States. It would seem sensible to agree to this notion. At the same time, it should be understood that not only because of a limitation of staffing but because of the variety of resources available at the smallest library, the process of advertising is not as simple as it would otherwise seem.

Library clients, no more so than those utilizing the services of other institutions, are not concerned about the abstraction of what this researcher and others would dignify as "public librarianship," but rather about the ability to find answers to practical questions/problems or to satisfy other informational needs. The trick of library advertising (marketing is preferred) is to insure the fact that it is constant and that as many avenues of the marketing mix are used as possible — local radio announcements, press releases, cable television promotions, printed brochures, posters, handouts at the grocery store, presentations at service organizations and other civic groups, etc.

On the issue of advertising, the next graph highlights the fact that only 37% of the respondents (who represent "daily," "weekly," and "monthly" users) reported hearing or seeing any communication (advertising) from the public library within the last year. The "?" category identifies those who either had no answer to this question or couldn't remember the last time they saw or heard any library advertising.

When Have You Heard or Seen Advertising?



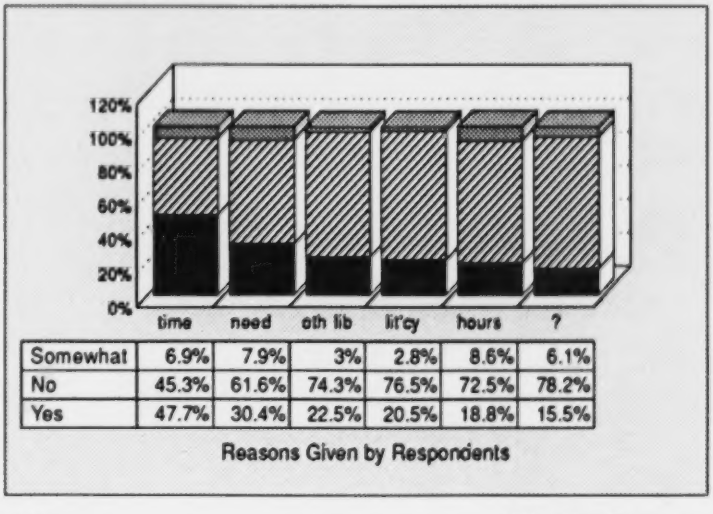
1991 survey

A cross tabulation of the data, not surprisingly, shows that users more frequently than nonusers reported an awareness of library public relations efforts. Specialists remind us, of course, that channels of communication are used selectively. That is, we tend to hear and read those things which are consistent with our own beliefs, and vice versa. The implication, therefore, is that those who are primed to use the library and its services are tuned–in and interested to what is going on. The challenge, now, is to extend this the nonuser.

While the discussion in the last few pages of this report has emphasized the issues of "time" and "need" as variables precluding greater use of the library, this researcher would like to return to the graph relating to the "reasons for not using the library more often" for some further commentary.

This visual also suggests that the "use of other libraries" and that "inconvenient hours" are also reasons precluding greater use. Also, "literacy" (the actual survey question was stated as, "I need to brush up on my reading") was an hindrance for one out of five respondents. On the matter of reading, for example, in a recent survey, an explanation of the public's lack of interest in reading may be observed by a series of questions asking the respondents about magazines. Twenty percent of those surveyed indicated that they find reading difficult (Roper 1992).

Reasons for not Using the Library more Often



	time	need	oth lib	lit'cy	hours	?
Somewhat	6.9%	7.9%	3%	2.8%	8.6%	6.1%
No	45.3%	61.6%	74.3%	76.5%	72.5%	78.2%
Yes	47.7%	30.4%	22.5%	20.5%	18.8%	15.5%

Reasons Given by Respondents

1991 survey

Yes No Somewhat

The "?" category in this graph depicted those who weren't sure what was available at the library. Finally, not appearing on this graph are other responses of interest: about one in five of those surveyed indicated that the library "didn't have what they wanted," and as positive reinforcement — the "lack of transportation" and the "staff is unpleasant" are not reasons hindering the greater use of the library.

The refrain above, "didn't have what they wanted," is relatively easy to understand given the fact that the average size book/magazine collection among the libraries surveyed is approximately 18,000 items (Chute 1993, 75). The forecast is not positive — in

most places around the country library revenues are decreasing or staying the same (which is also a loss) and the attitude of interlibrary cooperation is being altered by a growing concern for individual institutions rather than the common good. Interestingly, while technology has provided an accelerated rate of bibliographical identification, it is also causing a crash of resource sharing.

A Wish List of Services

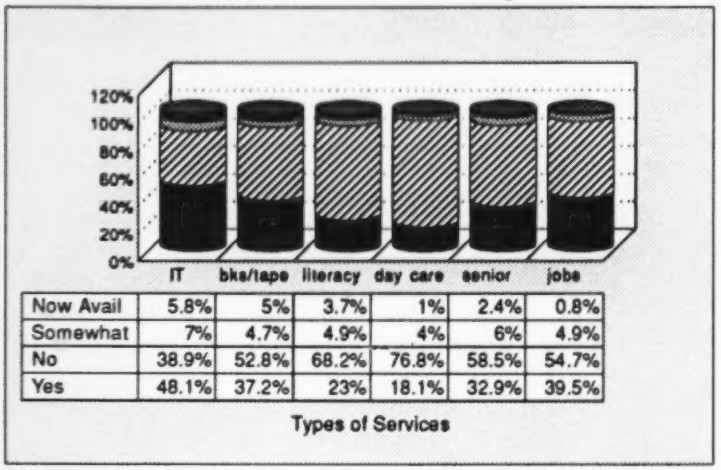
The purpose of the question resulting in the next graph was included in this survey for two reasons: first, to get a sense of some of the atypical library services currently being offered around the United States; and, second, to gauge the respondents reactions to emerging services such as day care, etc. Both concepts are related to an effort to help formulate a new model of public library service. Specifically, the question asked: "If your public library could provide the following services, would you be interested in them?"

From the graph, "IT," information technology (the actual survey category was "computerized information"), garnered the largest response rate. And it was not a great surprise, that a cross tabulation of the data shows a higher percentage of users answered "yes" and "somewhat" than nonusers.

It must be acknowledged that a question of this type has no penalty or investment for the respondent to answer other than in the affirmative. This should not deny the assumption that the American public along with those responsible for public library services are eager to be players in the new technology. One will note, that as far as the respondents are aware, only six percent of their libraries had "computerized information." Parenthetically, the last time that the Center for the Study of Rural Librarianship studied the incidence of computer technology in rural libraries with the feedback provided by librarians (as opposed to clients) the national average was about one in five libraries. Westin and Finger (1991) suggest that over 100 million Americans are waiting to use computers to improve

the quality of their lives. However, since the respondents in that study were not asked if they were likely to use these computers for information access in their "friendly" public libraries, one may only speculate about the relationship. Considering the fact that the computer world — according to Compuserve, Prodigy, and Microsoft — has only been able to penetrate the home market to the extent of 25% of the households, 100 million imminent subscribers does sound a tad over–stated.

Are You Interested in the Following Services?



	IT	bks/tape	literacy	day care	senior	jobs
Now Avail	5.8%	5%	3.7%	1%	2.4%	0.8%
Somewhat	7%	4.7%	4.9%	4%	6%	4.9%
No	38.9%	52.8%	68.2%	76.8%	58.5%	54.7%
Yes	48.1%	37.2%	23%	18.1%	32.9%	39.5%

Types of Services

1991 survey

Yes No Somewhat Now Avail

While it may be slightly unnecessary to emphasize, the most significant obstacle to the employment of computerized services in America's small and rural libraries continues to be the relative costs involved. While the federal government attempts to deal with the realities of an electronic infrastructure through the use of the Internet and the eventual formalization of the National Research and Education Network, legislation must include provisions for basic computer equipment or the majority of small and rural libraries in the United States will continue to be disenfranchised. But equipment purchase is only half of the problem, training needs are and will continue to be critical. For the population base being used in this investigation, that is, up to 25,000 people, only about 21% of the full–time equivalent staff (librarians) have currently completed their first professional library

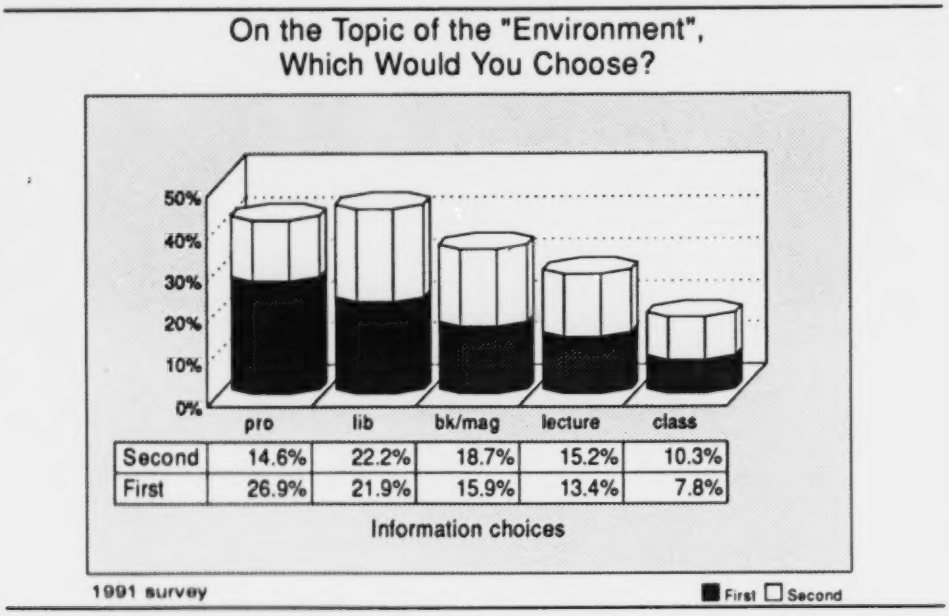
degree — Master of Library Science or its equivalent (Chute 1993, 30). The education/ training deficiency is so enormous and present methods are so inadequate that they can not possibly cope with future challenges as currently configured.

In addition to "computerized information," the previous graph also suggests that respondents are interested in "job training," "books on tape," "activities for senior citizens," "literacy," and "day care," respectively. Its interesting to note, that despite the number of respondents in this study who are of child–rearing ages, "day care services" was the least popular of the alternative choices. In this context, the suggestion was that the public library offer day care services. Perhaps the fact that it doesn't seem to be immediately related to information providing or something that one would associate with libraries, are the reasons for its relative lack of popularity. Personally, the author feels that it is a perfectly reasonable type of service to consider in rethinking the public library's role in society. So are the concepts of "literacy" and "job training." While this investigator is not unaware of the libraries already providing these services, my personal feeling is that "literacy/job training" provide critical opportunities for the future public library. Further, not only are these matters so crucial, there is already a built–in public acceptance of their importance. National public relations campaigns are not needed to sell the significance of literacy services to the American society. What is required, however, is the willingness of those responsible for public librarianship in this country to consider new concepts and forms of service.

Information Choices

A major objective of this research investigation was to consider the informational needs of those Americans residing in non–metropolitan areas and to evaluate their attitudes and uses of the public library. To this end, the next two graphs are offered for consideration. The questions behind these presentations were worded: "If you wanted more information on the subject of protecting the environment (or the subject of managing

money — which was the statement in the second question), which of the following would you do? Please give your first and second choices."



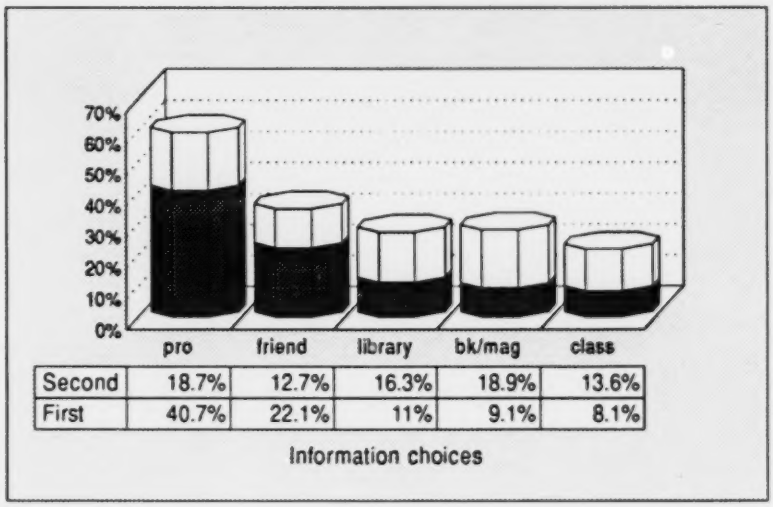
While in both questions, "ask a professional" was chosen more frequently than "ask a friend or relative," or "use the public library," the public library's relative role among the choices was not totally discouraging. Unfortunately, this circumstance does conform with comments made at the outset of this document. As enthusiastically as representatives of the library community attempt to convince everyone else, including themselves, that the library is the only game in town, they skirt reality.

The public library did fare better than "buy a book or magazine," "attend a lecture," or "take a class." And consistently the "public library" is a uniform second choice among respondents in both instances. Further, on the topic of the environment, if one considers both first and second choices together, the public library is a statistical favorite.

In a recent national survey, when the respondents were asked which of a dozen sources they turned to for useful ideas, Americans identified friends as the best source of information, with advice from family members as a strong second or third choice (Roper

December 1992). Parenthetically, there was initial concern when this study was beginning that the previous two questions might be answered to satisfy the surveyors rather than representing the true feelings of the respondents. From the answers to these questions, it doesn't appear that the concern was necessary.

On the Topic of "Managing Money," Which Would You Choose?



	pro	friend	library	bk/mag	class
Second	18.7%	12.7%	16.3%	18.9%	13.6%
First	40.7%	22.1%	11%	9.1%	8.1%

Information choices

1991 survey

■ First □ Second

Although it is now a recurrent theme in this report, those responsible for library services must not only recognize the alternative choices that are available at an accelerating rate to all Americans, including those who live in non–metropolitan areas, but attempt to distinguish and elaborate the library's role and cost benefits to those responsible for community leadership. Librarians have not made a great effort to compare the value of the library from an economical angle.

The situation described in the previous paragraph is unfortunate because a relatively easy case can be made if one only considers the costs of purchasing books, magazines, etc., on a personal basis as opposed to allowing (enabling) the library to provide those information functions. Likewise, while there is not the same panache and conve-

nience obviously associated with booting up one's computer at home and dialing Prodigy for an answer to a question from an electronic encyclopedia, from the cost perspective as well as the ability to deliver information, there is no contest with the public library (the library wins). At the same time, this investigator understands the significance of convenience in providing any service. Library administrators must also.

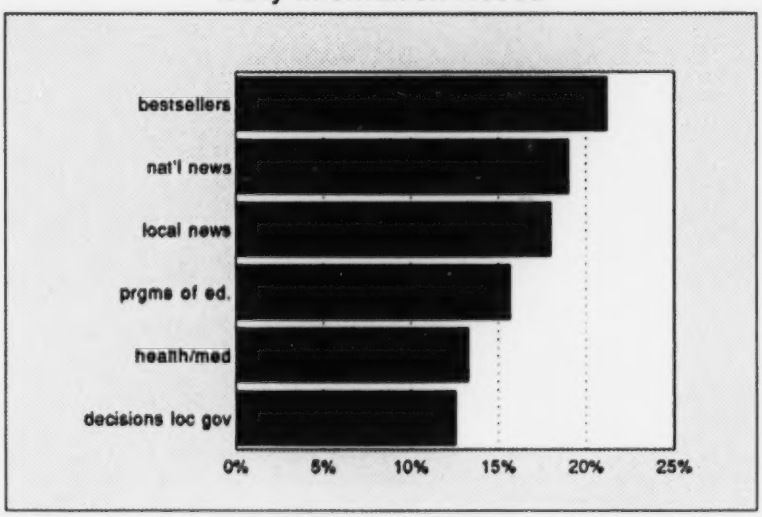
Daily Information Needs And Library Use

The final portion of this report concerns itself with the daily information needs experienced by respondents and the role of the rural library in meeting those needs. These comparisons were attempted by using equal or similar subject categories with *Assessing the Information Needs of Rural Americans*, although the present investigation did not allow for the 20 topics included in the earlier study. Analytically, while recognizing that everyone has information needs of one type or another, among the concerns in this investigation was the issue that perhaps the "typical American" doesn't really perceive his or her daily routines in the construct of needing information. Further, there was some discussion concerning the notion that perhaps "information needs" was more a librarian's/researcher's perception rather than a slice of reality. While this concern was not settled by the present investigation, one must assume that at least in a practical fashion the ability of respondents to articulate their needs is some indication of their awareness. It is recognized at the same time, however, that most individuals probably do not start their day by contemplating the question of "Hmmm, now what information do I need today?"

Parenthetically, the previous paragraph is symptomatic of some of the emerging concerns relative to whether or not individuals will be willing consumers of the information age incarnate as they are tantalized with a dizzying variety of home information choices — everything from the Sega Channel to CompuServe. As the major telecommunication players consolidate their positions (leaving the library farther behind), an academically exciting question is, "How much information do individuals really need?" Perhaps,

this is not the question at all. It may rather be, "How much will consumers spend?" It is also a useful concern for library administrators.

Aside from the philosophy of information, the next two graphs attempt to illustrate the results of the questions: "On a day–to–day basis, how important is it to you to have information on the following topics?" (Vavrek 1990); and, "On a day–to–day basis, do you need information on the following topics?" (current survey).



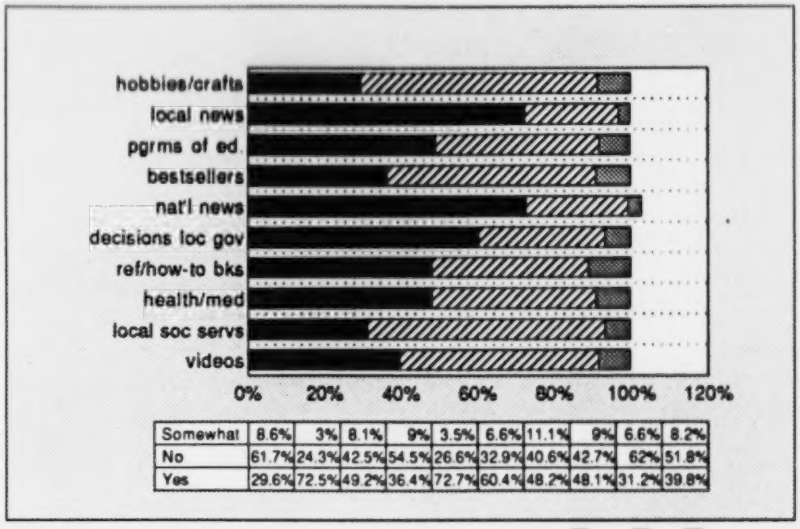
1990 survey

While the original intent was to keep these two questions exactly consistent between the two investigations, it became too complicated and time consuming to use the "one to five (1–5)" scale in the telephone survey. Rather, surveyors read the categories to the respondents and asked them to answer with "yes," "no," or "somewhat." As a consequence of this disparity, while graphs may be compared, one must understand the internal differences that were observed.

Despite different response values, one may witness the similarities between the categories of "local news" and "national news" as distinct choices in both graphs. As partial explanation for "bestsellers" as a clear favorite among those surveyed in the library, it should be noted that based on survey data collected in Vavrek (1990), library

users indicated that they read an average of approximately seven books/month over a six month period, while those polled by telephone indicated barely reading three a month. While this study did not differentiate between the reading of paperback or hard bound books as choices by readers, a recent survey of Americans found that 24% reported reading a paperback book in an average 24 hour period. This was an increase from 17% in 1987. Hardcover readership stands at 14% (Roper 1992). Whether or not these readers were provided service through their local public library is unknown. The public library's community role of providing books for reading is now an uncontested reality. Whether it is possible to renew the library's role by changing its image is a challenging question waiting an answer.

Daily Information Needs



Somewhat	8.6%	3%	8.1%	9%	3.5%	6.6%	11.1%	9%	6.6%	8.2%
No	61.7%	24.3%	42.5%	54.5%	26.6%	32.9%	40.6%	42.7%	62%	51.8%
Yes	29.6%	72.5%	49.2%	36.4%	72.7%	60.4%	48.2%	48.1%	31.2%	39.8%

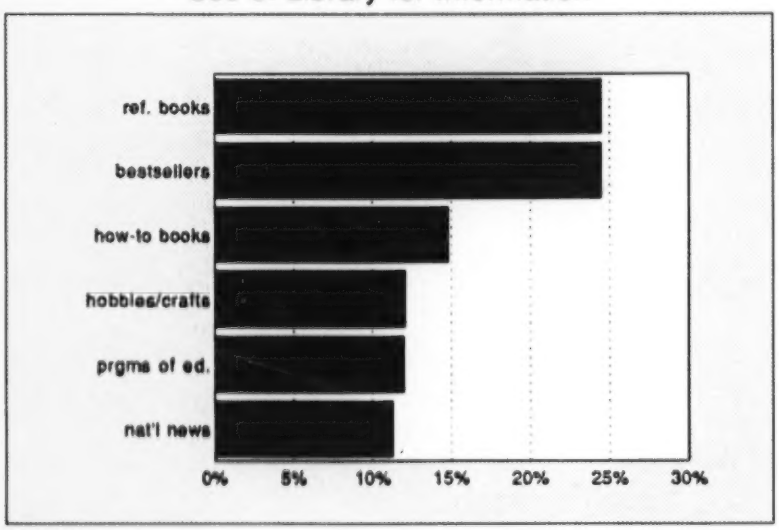
1991 survey

Yes No Somewhat

Still referring to the previous graphs, while the values are not the same, nevertheless, "decisions of local government," "information on programs of education," and information on "health and medical services" are consistent choices. Of importance to note is the fact that with the exception of "bestsellers" and "reference/how-to-do-it books," the other responses are for current information on timely issues. Perhaps this is not surpris-

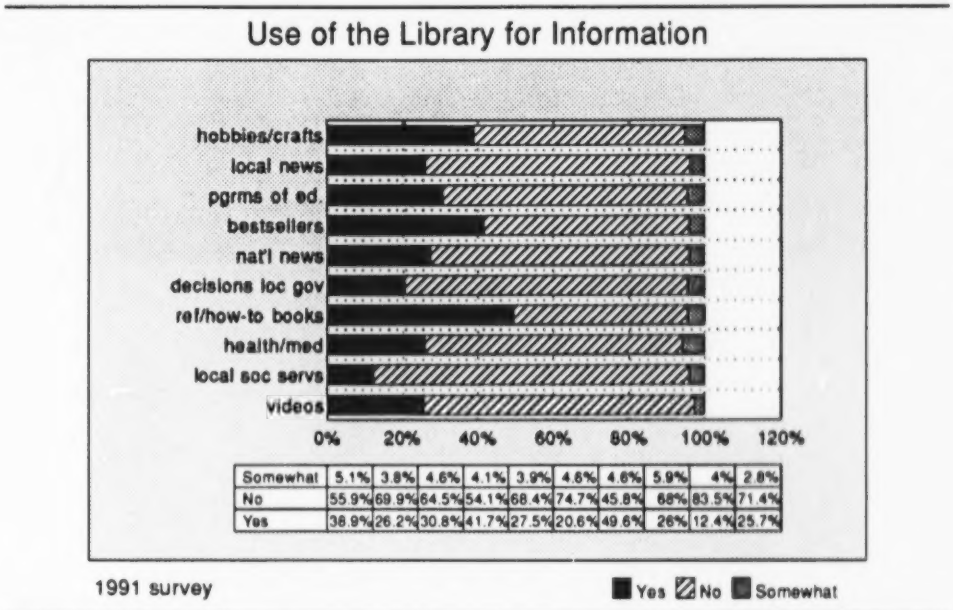
ing owing to the circumstance that the questions asked for "daily information needs." However, those responsible for public library services in the United States have not done an adequate job articulating the variety of information services available. As a consequence, the client's perception of the library is that it is a place of book–like resources.

The final two charts of this report may not conclusively provide evidence of the library's importance as only a book provider, but the implications are more than just subtle. There is little to hide "reference books" and "bestsellers" as clear choices by those surveyed. And at the same time, the use of the library as a source of information for current things such as, "local news," "national news," "decisions of local government," etc., is decidedly limited.



While it is understood that Americans would probably prefer to tune into their daily news on television, and in fact do, it is rather ironic that only 26% of the respondents in the telephone survey utilized the library for "local news," and approximately 21% consulted the library for "decisions of local government." On second thought, however, perhaps access to "local news" is simply accomplished by an available newspaper or

getting together with friends at the County Seat Restaurant (one may fill in the name of other suitable watering holes were folks get together to regularly exchange information, that is, gossip).



Although *Assessing the Information Needs of Rural Americans* (Vavrek 1990), shows a greater disparity between the information needs of rural Americans and their use of the public library to meet those needs, both studies (including the current one) illustrate the relatively weak role that the typical public library assumes when it involves providing current information. This is not necessarily to suggest that, for example, minutes of council meetings, reports of planning commissions, zoning ordinances, etc., are unavailable. Rather one would like to think that this is again a failure of the library to communicate its resources to a waiting public. It must be recognized, however, that there are additional challenges related to the identification and collection of current documents that might exceed the logistical capacity of typical staff person. An attitude that places value on collecting and utilizing these documents is, of course, a mandate.

STRATEGIES FOR CHANGE

Typically, research investigations are more successful at conjuring additional questions than providing complete answers. In modesty, while this study and its predecessor (Vavrek 1990), have offered more to be analyzed than completely explicated, they provide an array of data for consideration and action. While the purpose of both studies was to consider how rural people accessed and used information in the context of the public library, attempting to separate those investigations from a broader int*erpretation of librarianship and society would have ignored reality.

In this researcher's view, the public library in the United States, particularly in rural and small towns, is being left behind because of current governmental actions at the federal, state, and local levels. Earlier in this document the metaphor was that the public library was being "swept away" by change. More so, its relevance and societal role are being significantly affected by the very information society of which it is a part. Those responsible for public librarianship fail to perceive that technology, which is looked to as a solution for the problems confronting the modern library, is the reason that the library is failing. It can neither compete nor keep current with the machinations of an information society. There is neither national leadership nor financial support. This seemingly reduces opportunities for change to individual library circumstances. Further, it cannot help but create an attitude of "every person for herself/himself."

While the body politic — public librarianship — is waiting around to respond to current challenges, the Clinton Administration and Congress may forever alter models of service through changes in (or the demise of) the Library Services and Construction Act and the configuration of NREN and the Internet, in which all libraries hope to play a part.

Whether the institutional library can reinvent itself may not be the appropriate question, but rather is there still time for change. One would like to be optimistic and hopeful. To this end the following suggestions are offered.

1. Despite present successes, those responsible for the public library movement in the United States (the influentials of the library community) must recognize the imperative need to consider how the future is being orchestrated by circumstances outside of the control of their favorite institution. Even if all of the trends reviewed in this paper turn out to be "trendlets," the overwhelming conclusion cannot be escaped — the public library must review its role within a society that is now based on an information standard. Perhaps the result of this examination would be business as usual. One doubts it, but that after all would be the reason for analysis. If nothing else, it has significant public relations value. Who knows, maybe the press will become interested.

2. The American Library Association/Public Library Association and the National Commission on Libraries and Information Science must take leadership in helping to focus both public and professional sentiment for creating change. While neither of these two institutions has demonstrated its enthusiasm as a risk taker, they are the only logical choices. It must be particularly clear, however, to ALA/PLA and NCLIS that they are witnessing the decline and eventual demise of public librarianship in the United States as it is presently configured. Action is vital and it might begin with a national symposium — invitational in nature — that would involve as many segments of society as possible. For this to be effective, there must also be some willingness to develop a timetable with sustaining goals, measurable objectives, and strong efforts at evaluation.

3. State library agencies and professional associations must support the national effort described above. It is also imperative that this be a sustainable project with a willingness to re-examine all facets of the public library and its services. New thinking

is necessary, and starting with a blank sheet of paper rather than with already defined images would be desirable. An "outcomes" based strategy might be an interesting technique to pursue.

4. Library researchers must help to overcome the historical lack of empirical studies related to the impact of the public library. Notions about the library, not supported with research, provide little developmental infrastructure. Some members of the library community are very glib about reciting circumstances about the library that are inaccurate, as, for example, "the public library is the first place people consult for information." Holt (1993) suggests that what is needed is to build upon the *Public Library Enquiry* and to create a training mechanism so that more individuals become part of the research network. Parenthetically, the author is dismayed by speakers at library conferences who disseminate misleading data to eager crowds of listeners. It is even more depressing that these matters go unchallenged.

5. This author was at a recent meeting in which librarians were being politely scolded by a representative of large city government for being "political wimps" and for so easily accepting "no" for an answer to their budgetary requests. If members of the library community are able to reinvent the public library, it must be clear that this will be a hollow victory without sustaining political action and support. This latter suggestion, in some circles, is equated with the plague rather than a necessary fact of life. The lecturer, described above, reminded the same library audience that governmental officials typically "find" the funds necessary for mandated services as, for example, prisons, court services, etc., by allocating away monies from less critical (politically speaking) activities — the library. The recently announced 1994 budget for New York City shows support of public libraries following senior citizen centers, parks, and cultural institutions (Finder 1993). Those responsible for the future of public library service must be encouraged to form political action groups to insure both short–range and long–range success.

6. It is particularly timely for public librarianship to recast its functions while considering the relative roles of school, academic, and corporate libraries in the scheme of future services. Individuals representing these types of libraries must necessarily be integral to national discussions. The tendency to conceive of librarianship as consisting of parallel but never connecting segments must give way to a consolidated effort confronting similar needs. Combined action is vital.

7. Finally, it is particularly timely to look into the "professional souls" of those who comprise public librarianship and ask about their personal commitments at present and into the future. This researcher was dismayed by recent discussions with students relating to an interpretation of what constitutes the "crucial" role of the public library in society. Aside from the semantics of what is meant by crucial (does it mean life or death, enhancing one's life, etc.) it seemed that none of the students really thought that the library was critically important. While one should not be so bold to assume that Clarion is a microcosm for the attitudes of librarians in training everywhere, it is a heart stopping issue, one never really considered by this researcher. Is it possible, that in addition to all of the challenges facing the future of library services, that effective solutions are being denied because of a lack of confidence about the importance of libraries from within the ranks of librarians? Wow!

CONCLUSION

The author would like to end this report by relating a recent experience of observing the glazed stares on the collective faces of a group undergoing library orientation. After many years of teaching, the author can recognize blank stares with the best of them. In this metaphor, the orientation leader was happily talking about abstract matters such as the library's holdings, subject access, etc., but the audience's attention was "somewhere else." So it is with public librarianship at the present time. "New skills and new insights will be required to survive and prosper, and those who do not or cannot adapt will be left behind with all the social trauma that entails" (Wriston 1992, 46).

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TELEPHONE SURVEY RESULTS

The following data represent the preliminary results of a national telephone survey conducted among n = 5,676 adults residing in non-metropolitan areas in the United States during the period of February - June, 1991. The usable response rate was n = 2,485 (44%). This research was supported by the U. S. Department of Education, Public Library Programs.

Q1. Please indicate your age, at your nearest birthday, according to the following categories:

Female: 1,653 respondents, 66.3%

Male: 832 respondents, 33.4%

a. 17-26, 315 respondents, 12.6%

b. 27-36, 529 respondents, 21.2%

c. 37-46, 549 respondents, 22.0%

d. 47-56, 314 respondents, 12.6%

e. over 56, 781 respondents, 31.3%

Q2. How often do you use your public library or its services?

a. daily, 46 respondents, 1.8%

b. weekly, 387 respondents, 15.5%

c. monthly, 582 respondents, 23.3%

d. once a year, 38 respondents, 21.6%

e. less than once a year, 372 respondents, 14.9%

f. don't know/can't remember, 353 respondents, 14.2%

Q3. We realize that there are lots of reasons that people don't use their public library more often. Are the following concerns to you?

a. library is too far away
Yes: 357 respondents, 14.3%
No: 2,059 respondents, 82.6%
Somewhat: 69 respondents, 2.8%

b. no transportation
Yes: 148 respondents, 5.9%
No: 2,301 respondents, 92.3%
Somewhat: 33 respondents, 1.3%

c. hours are inconvenient
Yes: 467 respondents, 18.7%
No: 1,796 respondents, 72.0%
Somewhat: 213 respondents, 8.5%

d. it doesn't have what I want
Yes: 321 respondents, 12.9%
No: 1,930 respondents, 77.4%
Somewhat: 220 respondents, 8.8%

e. I have no need
Yes: 755 respondents, 30.3%
No: 1,530 respondents, 61.4%
Somewhat: 198 respondents, 7.9%

f. not sure of what's there
Yes: 386 respondents, 15.5%
No: 1,938 respondents, 77.7%
Somewhat: 153 respondents, 6.1%

g. staff is unpleasant
Yes: 64 respondents, 2.6%
No: 2,367 respondents, 94.9%
Somewhat: 37 respondents, 1.5%

h. not enough time
Yes: 1,181 respondents, 47.4%
No: 1,121 respondents, 45.0%
Somewhat: 170 respondents, 6.8%

i. I need to brush-up on my reading
Yes: 506 respondents, 20.3%
No: 1,882 respondents, 75.5%
Somewhat: 69 respondents, 2.8%

j. I am physically unable
Yes: 104 respondents, 4.2%
No: 2,346 respondents, 94.1%
Somewhat: 20 respondents, .8%

k. I use other libraries
Yes: 557 respondents, 22.3%
No: 1,834 respondents, 73.6%
Somewhat: 75 respondents, 3.0%

Q4. If your public library could provide the following services, would you be interested in them?

a. computerized information
Yes: 1,189 respondents, 47.7%
No: 962 respondents, 38.6%
Somewhat: 174 respondents, 7.0%
Available Now: 145 respondents, 5.8%

b. books-on tape
Yes: 921 respondents, 36.9%
No: 1,307 respondents, 52.4%
Somewhat: 118 respondents, 4.7%
Available Now: 125 respondents, 5.0%

c. literacy services
Yes: 569 respondents, 22.8%
No: 1,684 respondents, 67.5%
Somewhat: 123 respondents, 4.9%
Available Now: 92 respondents, 3.7%

d. day care services
Yes: 448 respondents, 18.0%
No: 1,896 respondents, 76.1%
Somewhat: 99 respondents, 4.0%
Available Now: 24 respondents, 1.0%

e. activities/senior citizens
Yes: 813 respondents, 32.6%
No:1,444 respondents, 57.9%
Somewhat: 149 respondents, 6.0%
Available Now: 61 respondents, 2.4%

f. job training
Yes: 975 respondents, 39.1%
No: 1,349 respondents, 54.1%
Somewhat: 122 respondents, 4.9%
Available Now: 19 respondents, .8%

Q5. When was the last time you saw or heard any type of advertising about your public library or its services?

a. last week (includes daily) 547 respondents, 21.9%

b. last month 341 respondents, 13.7%

c. within last year 309 respondents, 12.4%

d. no response/can't remember 1,113 respondents, 44.6%

These next questions concern your need for information on a daily basis.

Q6. On a day-to-day basis, do you need information on the following topics?

a. hobbies/crafts
Yes: 730 respondents, 29.3%
No: 1,523 respondents, 61.1%
Somewhat: 212 respondents, 8.5%

b. local news
Yes: 1,787 respondents, 71.7%
No: 601 respondents, 24.1%
Somewhat: 76 respondents, 3.0%

c. programs of education
Yes: 1,216 respondents, 48.8%
No: 1,049 respondents, 42.1%
Somewhat: 202 respondents, 8.1%

d. best selling books
Yes: 905 respondents, 36.3%
No: 1,355 respondents, 53.5%
Somewhat: 224 respondents, 9.0%

e. national news
Yes: 1,794 respondents, 72.0%
No: 583 respondents, 23.4%
Somewhat: 88 respondents, 3.5%

f. decisions of local government
Yes: 1,490 respondents, 59.8%
No: 811 respondents, 32.5%
Somewhat: 163 respondents, 6.5%

g. reference or how-to-book
Yes: 1,189 respondents, 47.7%
No: 1,001 respondents, 40.2%
Somewhat: 274 respondents, 11.0%

h. health / medical services
Yes: 1,186 respondents, 47.6%
No: 1,053 respondents, 42.2%
Somewhat: 223 respondents, 8.9%

i. local social services
Yes: 769 respondents, 30.8%
No: 1,528 respondents, 61.3%
Somewhat: 164 respondents, 6.6%

j. videocassettes
Yes: 981 respondents, 39.4%
No: 1,276 respondents, 51.2%
Somewhat: 204 respondents, 8.2%

Q7. If you wanted more information on the subject of managing money, which of the following would you do? Please give your first and second choices.

a. ask a friend or relative
first choice: 552 respondents, 22.1%
second choice: 317 respondents, 12.7%

b. ask a professional
first choice: 1,014 respondents, 40.7%
second choice: 466 respondents, 18.7%

c. buy a book or magazine
first choice: 227 respondents, 9.1%
second choice: 470 respondents, 18.9%

d. attend a lecture
first choice: 86 respondents, 3.4%
second choice: 189 respondents, 7.6%

e. use the public library
first choice: 274 respondents, 11.0%
second choice: 407 respondents, 16.3%

f. take a class
first choice: 203 respondents, 8.1%
second choice: 339 respondents, 13.6%

g. other: Specify
first choice: 35 respondents, 1.4%
second choice: 14 respondents, 0.6%

Q8. If you wanted more information on the subject of protecting the environment, which of the following would you do? Please give your first and second choices.

a. ask a friend or relative
first choice: 184 respondents, 7.4%
second choice: 167 respondents, 6.7%

b. ask a professional
first choice: 670 respondents, 26.9%
second choice: 363 respondents, 14.6%

c. buy a book or magazine
first choice: 397 respondents, 15.9%
second choice: 466 respondents, 18.7%

d. attend a lecture
first choice: 333 respondents, 13.4%
second choice: 378 respondents, 15.2%

e. use the public library
first choice: 547 respondents, 21.9%
second choice: 553 respondents, 22.2%

f. take a class
first choice: 194 respondents, 7.8%
second choice: 257 respondents, 10.3%

g. other: Specify
first choice: 25 respondents, 1.0%
second choice: 12 respondents, 0.5%

These last questions concern your use of information in the library.

Q9. Does the public library ever provide information to you personally on the following topics?

a. local social services
Yes: 301 respondents, 12.1%
No: 2,023 respondents, 81.1%
Somewhat: 98 respondents, 3.9%

b. videocassettes
Yes: 625 respondents, 25.1%
No: 1,731 respondents, 69.4%
Somewhat: 68 respondents, 2.7%

c. reference or how-to books
Yes: 1,201 respondents, 48.2%
No: 1,114 respondents, 44.7%
Somewhat: 113 respondents, 4.5%

d. local news
Yes: 636 respondents, 25.5%
No: 1,698 respondents, 68.1%
Somewhat: 93 respondents, 3.7%

e. programs of education
Yes: 748 respondents, 30.0%
No: 1,564 respondents, 62.7%
Somewhat: 112 respondents, 4.5%

f. best selling books
Yes: 1,011 respondents, 40.6%
No: 1,312 respondents, 52.6%
Somewhat: 100 respondents, 4.0%

g. hobby/crafts
Yes: 946 respondents, 37.9%
No: 1,358 respondents, 54.5%
Somewhat: 125 respondents, 5.0%

h. health/medical services
Yes: 630 respondents, 25.3%
No: 1,647 respondents, 66.1%
Somewhat: 143 respondents, 5.7%

i. decisions of local government

Yes: 499 respondents, 20.0%
No: 1,809 respondents, 72.6%
Somewhat: 112 respondents, 4.5%

j. national news

Yes: 669 respondents, 26.8%
No: 1,662 respondents, 66.7%
Somewhat: 96 respondents, 3.9%

Q10. Other than books, magazines and newspapers, are you familiar with other materials or services that your public library has?

Yes: 1,110 respondents, 44.5%
No: 1,332 respondents, 53.4%

April 15, 1991

~Name
~Street Address
~City, State Zip

Dear ~Name:

Within the next few weeks, we will be calling you from Clarion University as part of a national research study. In this survey, we are attempting to determine how adults use public libraries and what should be done to improve them.

We are writing you in advance of our telephone call because we realize that many people appreciate being advised that a research study is in process, and they will be phoned.

The survey should only take approximately 5 minutes. If we phone at an inconvenient time, please tell the interviewer to call back at a later time.

Your help in determining what people think about their public libraries is essential to the success of this study. It is greatly appreciated.

If you have any questions, please don't hesitate to ask our interviewer, or you may phone me at (814) 226-2392.

Sincerely yours,

Bernard Vavrek, Ph. D.
Director

BV/nh

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